

**DELAWARE COMMISSION OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
MEETING MINUTES
SEPTEMBER 28, 2004**

Members Present: Thompson, Hastings, Carroll, Harden, Kitson, Lardizzone, Magner, Morris, Newstadt, Timberman, Wasson and Webb

Members Excused: Ennis and Phillips

Staff Present: Davila, J. Jones, Anita Rich and Robert Vincent

Guests: Ed Moczulski (LP Lo-DEL), Robert Corsa, Ralph Hoag, Tom Daws and Terry Baker (VVA), Burton Barr (NARFE)

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to our Nations Flag.

Thompson – I would like to present a plaque to Anita Rich in memory of her husband, Robert Rich. As you know, he passed away in the year 2004 and he had been with us since 1994 (plaque presented). In front of you, you have some different papers, one of them addresses rumors about the destruction of personnel records, it is not true, it is a rumor. They are microfilming the records or using some other kind of system, but they are also keeping the hard copies, so it will not slow us down on any claims. On the home, as you know Tony Davila and I are on the committee to work with the architects on getting the home built. We are just a small group, Harriet Smith Windsor is on it and she has Al Carter as her direct advisor. But we are a small number in a big group, so we have to do a lot of discussion to make sure that what we think is right, and has a good chance of getting through. There are three sites under consideration. Tony Davila and I probably got the majority to agree with us, this is not the original site, but the second site.

Carroll – Are you speaking of three sites at the Milford location?

Thompson – Same location. Originally, we were given 13 acres, then it was 14+. That is still site B, at Airport and Salisbury Roads (reviews maps and points out locations of different sites).

Carroll – This is the first time this has been brought to the membership of this Commission.

Thompson – That is correct. We want you to know what the committee is doing. The Veterans Home Committee is comprised of three cabinet secretaries, Harriet Smith Windsor is only one, Administrative Services is the other, and Health and Social Services is the third one. That is why you got that letter from me telling you to get out there and publicize that. (Reviewing the flip chart) This is the site that everyone finally agreed on. It has a tree line in back and we have room for expansion. If we do get some money in the future and we want to expand, this is the one we can expand on. We can add the wings further out and put a little something on the sides. (Next chart) This is the original site, it changed a little bit, this was not as wide and it went a little further back. But they found they had problems, there was an old farm house from the 1800s. That was an archeological find and it would probably delay us many, many months before they got it cleared. Anytime you have water in Delaware, it could be an Indian site, so that area would have to be checked.

Carroll -Why is it pushed so far back on the property? That means the Veterans Home will be sitting behind a business complex.

Thompson – No, that has been changed, it is no longer going to be an industrial complex, like we were originally fighting about.

Carroll – Then why does that road look like a race track similar to a business park?

Thompson – It is just a perimeter road to cover the entire area.

Carroll – What will be developed around that road? Could it be businesses?

Thompson – They have already guaranteed it will not be anything that will interfere with the Veterans Home peace and quite.

Carroll – It was my understanding that having met in Milford with the powers to be there, when we first started this project that the piece of property that the Veterans Home would be in the far front off of Old Airport Rd with possibly an entrance off of RT 15. Now it appears, we are talking about a complex behind businesses and I just want to go on record now that I do not approve of that.

Davila – (Working with a flip chart) Continued to discuss the three choices for the placement of the Veterans Home as pointed out by Jim Thompson.

Carroll – I appreciate what you are saying as far as the ecological digs go, that would be on any site in the State. However, I really oppose that site plan because the Veterans Home should be seen prominently from a road, not stuck behind undeveloped area which could be a business park or whatever. This is not the game plan we first talked about.

Davila – So your concern is visibility?

Carroll – That is correct.

Davila – So you are saying that you like this property because of the visibility off of Airport Rd and RT 15?

Carroll – Although that has it's drawbacks also, but we don't want to be put behind something, where you have to drive through an industrial park or whatever.

Davila – So you are saying as far as space it is fine, but visibility is a problem. This issue can be taken back to the Committee and addressed at our next meeting.

Daws – First of all, I was unaware that there were even three options at the Milford site and all these issues you are talking about. Why was this not brought up in the Duffield Associates report?

Davila – Remember, the Duffield Associates report addressed all the different sites, as to what they had as far as potential placement of the home. What was looked at was this particular property and that was it (referring to map), nothing else.

Daws – So veterans' choice has nothing to do with it? It seems like a big switch to me.

Davila – No, let me explain further. When the sites were looked at by Duffield, all ten sites were just looked at for potential placement. You can look at the Duffield Associates report as to what they looked at with this acreage. That is what Duffield did for the first report. Then what happened after Haber Holloway Associates went and talked to Milford and Milford realized that there were going to be over 200 people working there, they were concerned more with the space needed. So in essence, what the City of Milford said is you can almost have any area on the almost 60 acres, if I am not mistaken it's 60 acres. So they came back to us last Wednesday with these three choices. So we are bringing this to the Commission to say these are the three options that were discussed. When we looked at these options, the Committee members that were present, and not all members were present, said based on what you are showing us, this seems to be the best choice (Site A), this seems to be the second choice (Site B) because of the layout, and Site C seems to be the least acceptable choice.

Magner – Why did they focus in on the road network when all three of those charts there, the inner loop is all the same and it looks like they are trying to focus the home somewhere around that without altering that inner road network. It appears to me that they are going to put something else in there.

Davila – I think this was how it was initially set up.

Magner – Then why don't they move the home out further and into where the road was and put the loop behind the home?

Davila – Well, they cannot move it further down because this is the area right here.

Corsa – But they kind of know about all these digs and wetlands on the property, that is probably why we got it.

Davila – They are finding out more about this now, is my understanding, at least from the last meeting (Wednesday) when all this was brought to our attention.

Baker - Just a small point, you made mention that now they know there is going to be about 200 employees. We have known since the beginning of the Veterans Home that there was going to be 200 employees.

Davila – I don't think Milford was aware of this issue.

Baker – Then they shouldn't have made a bid, this is really getting out of hand. Now we are back to making a choice, they should actually throw everybody back on the table again and make the choice. This is absolutely wrong.

Magner – There is no site preparation being done right now, so I think they ought to bring back these other sites that we were looking at and find the better of them.

Davila – I can bring your concerns back to the Committee.

Magner – I am upset about the whole Milford site thing right now and I am going on record as saying that.

Davila – All I can say to you is this is what was looked at and this was what was proposed last Wednesday.

Carroll – It is very convenient that this man here is not here, because he was the one pushing this.

Davila – It is still the Milford property, you are just having three site selections on the same property.

Carroll – Was the subject brought up about having an entrance off a given road, has that been directed? It looks to me like it is a complex and the home will be part of this complex. Is it possible that the home could be Old Airport Rd out.

Davila – What are you suggesting, it be further down like in here someplace? It still can be where we said it could be, there is no change there, B could still be the favorable spot, that is where we said we wanted it.

Harden – But it is not laid out the way we wanted it.

Davila – This is the Mississippi design, they just used it for an example so they had something to work with. This is the Collins Home in Mississippi. What they did here was to put that on the 14.1 acres, as you can see from the design. What the Commission here is saying is you want it here, the same place as it originally was, and that is an option. That is what the architects are saying would be the option, 14.1 acres. Of course that limits our space for expansion, but if you favor this particular site, we will take this information back to the Committee and tell them the Commission still prefers the original site.

Baker – Going back to plan A, right where Airport Rd makes the little turn, between there and where the inside road goes back toward the north, there is going to be a two story building built right there; the Boys and Girls Club.

Corsa – May I read something, may I be recognized as the President of the VVA. (Reads letter of protest - attached). In November of 2003, New Castle County Executive Tom Gordon provided a letter donating 20 acres of Marl Pit Road as a site for the Veterans Home. In March of 2004, another letter was sent detailing items such as sewer and electric. We believe another letter detailing utilities was sent, but we do not have a copy of that. It is very clear that New Castle County was willing to give us land for our Veterans Home. In June of 2004, a letter was sent from Gloria Homer asking veterans organizations for their preference by July 2, 2004. On July 2, 2004, Mr. Thompson detailed in a letter why each site was rejected, the vote was taken on July 1 and it negated any choice veterans may have wanted. We also did not understand who the members of the Bond Bill Committee went to see to be told that New Castle County would not honor there commitment. We the VVA, feel that certain backdoor politics were in place in order for the Milford site to be selected. We are willing to listen and meet with whoever could shed some light on these truths, which I want to be printed in the minutes here. This whole thing is up in the air, this is not resolved, there are so many issues; this could go on for another two years. I thank you for your attention.

Thompson – We are not in charge of the Home and we don't know if we will be in charge of the Home. The Commission is asking to get control of the home so we can run it. Right now, it will probably go to Health and Social Services. We need to get our letters out and get veterans to ask for the Commission to have control of it. We have no say so, except for two votes out of about 15 on the Veterans Home Committee. They keep discussing Health and Social Services as providing the operational support, not us.

Davila – We were presented this last Wednesday and all we are doing is bringing the information back to the Commission. Basically, around the table, people said option A seemed to be good because of the space and the options. I agree with Bill Carroll, the visibility from the highway is the poorest and we all agree.

Kitson - What about rotating that to the same elevation as A on that same spot, so the parking lot is over toward Canterbury Road? Turn it 90 degrees down, so that the road into the parking lot comes off Airport Road.

Davila – We can bring it back to the Committee.

Thompson – If you were the veteran, would you rather face cars zipping by or would you want woods behind you? It is what the veteran himself might want.

Morris – If there is a potential for them to make decisions on the entire acreage, then a recommendation or a thought process can be taken back to Milford. Like he says to rotate this 90 degrees so that the spokes of the Home face upward so the parking lot is over to the left. Then ask that they go back with their dedication of property to the line where the water and trees are right back in there. Now that would bring that back up in acreage and put some of the thought process that we were talking about on the first site right there. Then you possibly would not encroach on that archeological site or wouldn't do anything to it that would damage the site.

Davila – So basically, turn this 90 degrees, extend it toward the back and then have your entrance off Airport Road.

Magner – I think we need to have a meeting with the town of Milford to find out what their thoughts are for what else is going into the property.

Thompson – This is being discussed by the Department of Administrative Services with Milford, we are not even in the process.

Magner – Well, then we need to be in that process.

Thompson – We have no say so over this right now.

Magner – As Commissioners that represent every organization in the State, I think we need to go back to our organizations.

Davila – Let me make a suggestion, let us bring this to the Committee meeting on Wednesday, explain what you have just said, turn this around and see if that option is feasible.

Baker – We are not shooting the messenger first of all, the town managers and town planners of Milford new years ahead of time what is on their lands, open spaces and what they plan to do with it. They have known this, and that is why they are adamant, and this gentleman here was so adamant about getting this in Milford. Now they are back pedaling and trying to make it fit what their plan was. Now they are giving you choices, there was nothing on the table about three choices. This is your piece of property, this is what you have and now they are back peddling because they think we have no way out. This is what the State has decided, this is where it will go and I think we should go back to the town of Milford and tell them none of this is acceptable. Until they get down on paper what is and isn't, then we can make the decision.

Davila – Well, they have given us this land here originally.

Baker – But they have given it to us, and now they are telling us something different.

Davila – No, these are only options, three options that they put on the table last Wednesday. Now, if you are telling me the option here is to turn this 90 degrees and go with our original piece of land, I can bring this back to the Committee and tell them that. Is that acceptable or not?

Baker - The Committee can say you know what, we still don't care what you people are saying, we are going to give you what we want to give you.

Davila – That is correct, I can't say that they will accept that. All I can say is that the Commission and the veterans in attendance said that the acceptable thing would be to turn this 90 degrees and have an entrance way off Airport Road. That is what is acceptable, A and C are not acceptable, and that is all I can tell them.

Discussion about maps.

Carroll – Are there any restrictions coming off of Airport Road regarding DELDOT, the width of the road, the traffic involved? You see that entrance looks like it is across from the entrance to another complex.

Davila – That is exactly where you were for the ceremony. There is an entrance and there are doctors' offices in front.

Carroll – Were there considerations because of this not being able to develop another entrance.

Davila – That is a good question. There was something about sewage, but I cannot remember what it was, but I will find out.

Thompson – Somebody did say there could be a stop light as time went on.

Daws – I would like to pass this out. These are some questions that VVA is requesting the Commission respond to in writing.

Corsa – Once we get civilians involved in our business, which is veterans, we end up getting the short end of the stick. I am sure you can reach out and get a hospital administrator to run this. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in New Jersey runs all their Veterans Homes, and they run very nice homes.

Thompson – We are pushing hard and your own representative just got a letter saying contact him because we do not want to be a hospital, we want to be a Veterans Home. But it is going to go that way, and it does not look good unless we get out there and start stirring the pot. So you can start stirring the pot by contacting your people and writing letters to the newspapers and writing sound off and asking how come. Get every bit of activity you can get going and we might be able to get the home under our control, which is what we want; because veterans take care of veterans. We cannot do this by just talking to the Veterans Home Committee. Everyone on there, with the exception of me, is a State employee and I am on there because they had to put the Chairman of the Commission on there. If you have questions about the legislation and site up north; write to the Bond Bill Committee and ask them what happened. Because I put a letter out to everybody, this is what we were told by the people up there. I only succeeded at a few things; one - I kept it from being on the hospital property and the other they wanted to have on RT 13 in Camden. Again, they just let me talk over there; I had no authority to be there and no vote with the Bond Bill Committee.

Magner – Of the Commissioners here that were at the August 10th meeting with the town of Milford, how many of you heard the town commissioner say that Hospice was talking about building two Hospice facilities in the State of Delaware, one in New Castle and one in Kent on this site. And he also mentioned this area was ideal for other medical support units that would go into that area.

Lardizzone – He said it would not be an industrial park.

Magner – But there are still going to be businesses associated with medical in that area, that was his idea.

Thompson – Well the Boys and Girls Club is not medical.

Magner – No, the other property.

Thompson -All that we have been told through this Committee we are on, is that there will be no industry, manufacturing, or anything like that to cause problems. That is all we would need is some 85 year old man and some chicken factory next door. We did get back from Milford that there will not be anything bad that will affect us.

Carroll – In reference to whoever will control the Veterans Home; we know that the criteria from the VA is that there will be frequent inspections and the guidelines of running that home will be under their standards or there will not be money paid to run that home. I am not opposed to the Commission running it, but I am bringing this to light. The fact is that the veterans' organizations, we as a body, will be a very important part of that home no matter who runs it and that the VA will be there to follow up on the procedures being controlled in that Home.

Thompson – Correct me if I am wrong, but the VA has certain rules; they are not going to get too deeply into it because the idea of passing it to the State is for the State to run it. If they are violating laws or something, that is different. But if Health and Social Services runs it and they decide to run it more like a hospital, then the VA can't say anything about it.

Carroll – I beg to differ. From what I have heard and been involved in, the VA has a very vital part of running this Home.

Davila – Carroll is correct. They have to do a 100% inspection and we have to be able to come up 100% in compliance before we get our first federal dollar. They do on-the-spot inspections, sometimes unannounced inspections, and things along that line. However, not only do we have to meet federal guidelines, but we have to meet State guidelines, especially if we are a Medicaid/Medicare facility.

Harden – Mr. Chairman, this Committee of which Tony Davila and you are a member, is the Committee making the decision as to who is going to run the Veterans Home?

Davila – Negative.

Thompson – The Governor right now will select.

Harden – Is there a deadline for these letters or calls?

Thompson – I would say to get it out as soon as possible.

Harden – Well, we did that with the letters coming back on the site selection. They chose the site on July 1st and the deadline of the letter was July 2nd.

Thompson – In that case, they gave me a half hour notice. I was able to change clothes and get down there within a half hour.

Daws – But that is not your fault, that is that back handedness.

Thompson – Just two of us are part of this Committee, they make the decisions, we have a vote on it. But the Governor will select who will be the one who runs it, unless the State legislature gets involved, like they did with the Cemeteries, and put it under the Veterans Commission. Right now it is up for grabs. In fact, there was a news broadcast and the Secretary of Administrative Services said that it was up for grabs, they did not know who would get it, however, she thought it would be Health and Social Services.

Newstadt – The VA standards, I think you will find, are generally going to address the professional standards, the quality of care, basic care, and etc. I think the operative points that we are concerned with as veterans, is the quality of life issues, the totality of the atmosphere for the veteran, and the fact that the families and the veterans in there would have the assurance that there would be folks out there with empathy and an understanding of the uniqueness of veterans' needs. The VA can't do that, it is subtle, it is intangible. The point is, I think it is absolutely critical that veterans take care of veterans. I think that is the whole principal, it's not that we run it or that they run it. It is an emotional point and I think that the guys here are addressing that and I think they feel the same way, and I think all of us feel the same way. It is critical to establish an atmosphere and an attitude that we send to the VA, to the State, to the people in the Home, and so forth, that we are here for those guys and girls that are going to be in there.

Thompson – They are not just a patient for us, they are fellow veterans, it could be us someday.

Carroll – Fellow Commissioners, you don't think for one minute that any member of this Commission or any veterans' organization in this State, if it were administrated by whoever, saw anything that wasn't proper, that it wouldn't be brought to the forefront and corrected, it would be. Now this is a different subject, but I am saying this site would not be run as a normal retirement home, this is not the case. You know, and I know, that we would be a part of overseeing that facility regardless.

Thompson – One of the veterans that I visit at the hospital just died on me and I used to visit him every two to three weeks. He was at the Chronically Ill in Smyrna, which is very sterile, and there were no veterans' organizations in there helping, with the exception of me. That is not good, we need a place that says we are veterans and this is ours. We have 15

veterans' organizations here and all are interested in the Home. With 15 veterans' organizations, I know we are going to participate, I am already collecting books and we will not need them until 2007.

Daws – The problem I see is, we as a united front, should put our foot down. I am not arguing the site here. When they made that decision on July 1, our membership, and who we are as a body, was not given the opportunity to voice our opinion because they told us July 2. Now we see how it is going to continue and it is going to get so far out of hand that we are not going to be able to have a say because we have not firmly put our feet down. Whether we stop or slow down until we make this Veterans Home right for our guys, these people are running us around. It started when they made the vote and picked the site and now it is going to continue until we form a united front. Unless we really raise a lot of devil, nothing is going to be done. They are not going to listen to you, Jim Thompson, because they don't care. They are not going to listen to Tony Davila either, because they do not care. Until we make them care or push them out of the way, nothing is going to be done.

Thompson – I put out that letter in July and how many people complained to the Bond Bill Committee in writing? When I put that out I couldn't say complain, I just published it saying what they told me. I was waiting for people to start blasting.

Daws – You have a right to complain, as an officer of the State, you represent us.

Thompson – But I also represent the State.

Daws – You cannot represent two bodies.

Thompson – Yes we can, we are a veteran organization and we are appointed by a veterans group. However, when we are here; we are also State officials. We have to be careful of what we say; we cannot get involved in politics or anything like that.

Carroll - We are selected by the veterans' organizations to represent them.

Thompson – We can go back to them and say here are our problems. Marine Corps League has already written some letters and we have some more we are putting out now. It is up to all of us to push.

Morris – It is obvious that emotionally around this table and around this room, that we are not going to solve this in an hour. What we need to know now is what to do next. I see two things we need to do. If your meeting is every Wednesday, it is obvious that the body here, maybe not in total, but at least the body is in agreement that something close to Canterbury Road, Airport Road is selected. We probably feel like Terry Baker said, it is not going out of Milford, so we are not even going to argue that point. If they are willing to give us 22 acres on the backside, then they should be willing to give us 22 acres from the front side. Sort of turn it so that it is still in the front like it was initially, and I think most veterans and most Commissioners were acceptable with that. I don't think we were too upset about the location when we went down to the transfer of the deed. Then we need to get the town manager before the Commission, and explain this is what we anticipate, so if you are willing to work with us, we are ready to go. I don't think we need to go back and rehash this thing, but I initially thought that site A was fine and dandy, but there were some other issues that were raised that I wasn't thinking about. But I think like Jesse Kitson said, we can rotate that facility and give us an entrance off of Airport Road. Even if we don't get an entrance off of Airport Road, at least it will be positioned for a circular road to be there, then the town manager can then get the recommendation to get the serenity to the back area there and join it with Hospice, if that is what they want to do. But we need to move on and get that done. The meeting is tomorrow; we need you two to go back with that input.

Hastings – Who opened this can of worms?

Thompson – It was a combination of the Department of Administrative Services, the architects, and also within the Department, Facilities Management.

Hastings – You said a while ago that Admin Services was going to talk to the City of Milford.

Thompson – They have been talking to them. They are the ones who agreed that we could go pick any property we want because of the problems with this one.

Hastings – Are any of the members of the House and Senate Joint Veterans Committee involved in this?

Thompson – No, we are still trying to contact them. I have talked to a few, and hopefully I can have a meeting this week with the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs. The final thing we need is something in the Delaware Code with the definition of the Veterans Home to be under the Commission. It doesn't mean we will try to run it, it means we hire good qualified people to be there.

Hastings – We know from research, that well over half the Veterans Homes across the United States are under the jurisdiction of the State Veterans Commission, and only a small percent are under the jurisdiction of the State Health and Human Services Department. In only a few instances, was it contracted out to a private contractor. I think that is a point that we need to continue to emphasize. I really think the House and Senate Veterans Committee should be well read into this and should be a player.

Thompson – Mr. Bunting, who is the Senate Committee Chair has declined to acknowledge me. I have to go down and sit on his doorstep. Hopefully this week, we will meet with Mr. Cathcart and I will explain the whole thing, the problems we are having and what is going on. It is his decision whether he brings it in front of the group. The big thing is the letters, get as many out as you can.

Davila – We will bring this issue to the Committee tomorrow and explain the concerns of the people in attendance here today and let them know that there is a problem with the A diagram, of course C is not even being considered, and B is the choice of the Commission if we consider rotating it 90 degrees.

Corsa – So is there a public forum in that Committee?

Davila – As far as I know there isn't, but I don't see why you couldn't walk in and ask to sit in on the meeting.

Corsa – Do you think we could have the time and day of this meeting?

Davila – It is tomorrow at 2PM. All the meetings are conducted here at 2PM every Wednesday. You can come in and ask Secretary Homer if you can sit in on the meeting and voice your opinion. That is totally up to her; she is the Chair. Let me turn the chart around and talk about some of the rooms and room design (discussion).

Barr – I just wanted to let the Commission know that NARF is ready to start pounding the halls of Legislative Hall for any legislative action that may come before the group. The Elks has their byline that as long as they are veterans, they are able and willing to assist in the Veterans Home.

Corsa – In the land of Sussex County on November 4, Returns Day, the VVA will be dedicating what we call our "Welcome Home" Memorial to the 27 men that were KIA in Vietnam. It is going to be placed on the circle on South Veterans Street. The ceremony will start at 10:00AM. I am sure I don't have to explain to you Delawareans that Returns Day down in Sussex County is kind of a big day so you are all invited.

Thompson – You should try to get a little something in the newspaper.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

CEMETERY COMMITTEE

Newstadt – I and the three other members of our committee met with the Northern Cemetery Family Group on August 24, 2004, accompanied by Chairman Thompson and our Executive Director, Mr. Davila. I thought the meeting went well; hopefully we are going to establish an atmosphere of mutual respect so that any semblance of an adversary relationship can be prevented. The members of that committee obviously have strong feelings about the Cemetery, but I think that they are being addressed. They also received and made a selection on the memorial plaques that will be going up, so we will now have a standard plaque for the Cemetery in replacing the odd mix that was there before. The Executive Director and I visited the Southern Cemetery on September 22, 2004, and met with the Southern Cemetery Family Group. Most of whom, in fact all of whom, expressed their approval of how the Cemetery was being run and approval of how it looks. In fact, they have pledged to do what they can to sustain that outstanding facility. I am looking forward to working with both of the family groups, and I think given the great condition of both of the Cemeteries, we are on the right track.

Carroll – I would like to bring this to the attention of the Chairman of the Cemetery Committee. Two things; the name plaques will they be of bronze construction?

Newstadt – Yes.

Carroll – The next being; there were a series of flag poles which flew a number of the veterans' service flags at the Bear Cemetery. It was very picturesque, beautiful setting outside of the Cemetery as you go down RT 896. I understand that the sign is to be changed or eliminated, but I want it to be on record that I feel that those flag poles should be replaced. There are a number of people that have contacted me, knowing my position that I was opposed to them being removed. I was told it was being done because of the extra construction that was going on. I do not know what the status is now, but I think that was very picturesque and I want you to keep that on your agenda, if you will.

Davila – Let me address the replacement plaques. This is what we have now, and as you can see, some of these are damaged. This is the new plaque, a concrete base with an insert. These are not brass or bronze, they are plastic. They look good and this is what was accepted by the Family Advisory Cemetery Committee and they are very reasonable in cost. These will be replaced sometime in the spring, once we make sure we have all the wording and names correct. As you can see there is quite a bit of difference. These will lay flat in the ground so that it is easier for the grounds crew to take care of the Cemetery property. Also, we will not have the damage that we have currently from weather, machinery blades, etc.

Newstadt – Do you have the picture of the standard VA marker?

Davila – On the VA Form there are about 4. You have the bronze flat marker, the one we use, and you have the gray granite marker and a marble marker, and there is one other. I have already discussed this with the Cemetery staff. Once we complete that field (6,000 vaults), I suggested to them that we call it The Avenue of Flags on the exit of the Cemetery around the back loop. Put all the unit flags there and any other unit's flag and pole.

Carroll – Will that only be flown only ceremonial days?

Davila – I would prefer they be flown at all times. I think that would be very attractive and give some beauty to the memorial ground. That is my suggestion and that is what I explained to the Bear staff. I don't think the Commissioners would have any problem with this plan.

Webb – I know that J.J. Jones had a lot of problems with organizations, when the flag would last approximately six months and they had no replacement. They didn't seem to be worried about replacing it; they were just worried about flying it. To me, each organization should send a least five flags down there when this goes into effect. When they get down to two; a letter should be sent out to the organization telling them they need to replenish the supply.

Davila – You are being generous in saying five flags. My vision of this plan is to have at least three flags given to me immediately. Once we get down to one flag, we will request replacements from the units. But if you are saying five flags, then I'll take five.

Webb – I keep hearing about we have to have the flags flying; but the flags have to look good too.

Davila – Any flag that looks damaged or worn would be replaced immediately. I think we currently have five or six poles.

Carroll – 10 poles.

Davila – Okay, 10 poles. Since we have 15 organizations, we can put five more up and if there are other organizations, like Submariners and others that want to have a flag pole, then that can be arranged.

Hastings – Does the service organization pay for the pole and the installation of the pole?

Carroll – Yes.

Magner – Does the Southern Cemetery have same thing?

Davila – No, not yet.

Newstadt – Let's talk just a minute about the organizational plaques in the chapels. What's the feeling of sustaining that, adding to it, freezing them the way they are? There are not 15 organizations represented in the chapel.

Davila – There are not 15, you are right. I do not know if every organization has one or they just don't want one. I imagine the organizations on the Commission should be represented there.

Webb – They are like \$1,800.

Davila – They are very expensive.

Harden – Who pays for the plaques?

Davila – The organization.

Carroll – I would like to reflect on the plaques. The plaque that we have up there was the first one that was cast and it ended up being close to \$700 because of the design and everything. We were about to get that through the administration at the Cemetery at a reduced cost from the foundry. However, at the Sussex Cemetery, there has never been a wall structurally sound to have these plaques displayed. Therefore, there has been a cabinet made by some on-site technicians and they are very nicely displayed. But they have not had a place for many, so there are less at the Southern Cemetery than there are at the Bear Cemetery.

Morris – I don't think freezing is going to do any good, as an organization does come on line that can afford it, they are going to want to put one there and I think that is acceptable.

Newstadt – I was just saying those are choices the Commission might want to make.

Morris – If we ever get enough down there, like we have up at the Northern Cemetery, we might want to re-look at how they are displayed. I think we should encourage them to be there. To be honest with you, they should be displayed in the Veterans Home.

Timberman – I would like to point out that at present we are not following the agenda and we are out of order; we have disregarded the approval of the minutes.

MOTION BY KITSON TO ACCEPT AUGUST COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES, SECONDED BY NEWSTADT, MOTION CARRIED.

LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

No report.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Carroll – I sat in for Tony Davila, who has been a part of the selection committee for various positions at the VA. This is for the new position for the director of the Hospital in Wilmington. This was very involved, there were 15 candidates, their résumés were forwarded here and Tony Davila went through the process with me. I was evaluating applications from Thursday until our meeting at the VA on Tuesday. The applicants, reduced to 9 from 15, stretched all over the country, with three of them currently being administrators of other facilities. From that process, there was another committee meeting in Pittsburg, that we were unable to attend, that took the 9 candidates and reduced them to 3. Those 3 applicants were then presented to the VISN Director, Charlene Zabo. From there, they will go to Central VA and a director will be chosen. It was a very enlightening process.

PERSONNEL

Lardizzone – We hired two Conservation Tech I's and one Conservation Tech 5 for the Cemetery.

Davila – We have a full complement of people up North now, except we are still looking for one casual/seasonal. The Southern Cemetery is down one since we promoted Steve Rust. We will be advertising that position soon.

Morris – Who took Bob Rich's position?

Davila – That would be Greg Bee. That position is now Statewide, it is not like it was before; that individual is utilized wherever he is needed. Then the position that Greg Bee had up State, I transferred downstate, the position is now is assigned to the Sussex Cemetery.

GROUNDBREAKING & DEDICATION

Morris – The Committee met here before the meeting. I brought quite an extensive list and I will just go over it very quickly. We have gone over who to invite, I will probably get with Tony Davila, an hour or so after the meeting because I have several items I will need his input for. But the Committee looked at it and obviously we need to do an immediate blitz, we know of all the veterans that are members of veterans' organizations, but there are a lot of veterans who are not and we would like to have a good showing at this groundbreaking. Inviting the media; deciding how much media and how much activity. One of the things I mentioned was to contact the State Chamber of Congress, eventually this home will be supported not only by veterans and the State, but we also feel private institutions and businesses will have an involvement someplace along the line. Some of the things we looked at is we will have the need for refreshments and alternative plans for bad weather. Hastings recommended that we could contact General Vavala for a possibility of some large tents, which is something we can work on. Setting up access for people with disabilities because they may need assistance getting to and from. I brought a poem that I got in church and would like to read the poem (reads poem). We are going to work on an agenda; Hastings gave me a copy of one that was done at a dedication ceremony. Everyone seems to be serious about the trenching tool and I have found a source on that in New Jersey at the price of \$6.50 a piece, which is not bad. I have their number and what I am going to do is call them and ask some questions. We are going to have to sit down and decide how many, who, what, where and how. We decided that the chairman at the time will be the MC. I will talk with Tony Davila about speakers, a memorial agenda to be given to the prominent individuals, including the Commissioners. A media blitz to start and some pictures taken. A few recommendations were made about having a prayer and that the public affairs division of the National Guard would help out, maybe making the media blitz. I will set up a meeting with Tony Davila and try to iron out some of these details and then I will set up another meeting with the Committee.

VETERANS MEMORIALS

Kitson – We have not had a meeting, but what I would like all the Commissioners to ask at their next department meeting to get the word out to their members to go around and write down the location of where there is a memorial and get the information back to me through the Commission office, so we can make a list and I will go around and take pictures of everything so we can have a good starting spot.

Carroll - Are you asking for all the memorials throughout the State?

Kitson – Yes, I've gotten about five or six that Sherri Taylor had here, but I know there are more than that. I know about the Delaware Bridge and the Vietnam Memorial up in Wilmington, and the one they use at the parade. I know some of them, but to get them all, we need our members to go out because they are going to know some we don't know.

Hastings – Also, you will find some memorials in cemeteries. There are a bunch of them around the State that I do not think we know about.

Kitson – We have a digital camera that I am going to go around and take a picture of every one of them.

Magner – I have pictures of quite a few of them in New Castle County.

Davila – As you know there is an amount of money that has been put in the budget of the Commission for the World War II Memorial (discussion).

Carroll – I would like to address this to Jesse Kitson, we had discussed the fact that there was not an all veterans - all wars memorial monument in the capital of Delaware. We have talked about this at other meetings and I think that is something that needs to be addressed. We have the different areas, and I am not opposed to a WWII memorial, I am a WWII veteran myself, but I feel strongly that there should be some prominent type of memorial for all veterans, for all wars, somewhere in the confines of our State capital.

ORGANIZATIONAL REPORTS

Wasson (DELVETS) – I want to call your attention to this article on former Commissioner Charles Farrell. Just goes to show you that Commissioners do other things besides Commission work, and he was honored for his efforts in connection with the Commission. I did act on Tony Davila's and Bill Carroll's behalf at an American Legion meeting back on September 16, 2004. I presented speaking points on the Veterans Home and I think it went well.

Harden (WAVES Nat'l) – We had a meeting on Saturday of the WAVES Unit 10 of the 1st State. We discussed our organization participating in the "Salute to Hospitalized Veterans Week" at the VA Hospital, which will be starting February 13, 2005. American Legion has a whole day on the 14th, WAVES Unit 10 is going to take it Wednesday afternoon. That is a week that all the different organizations come to the hospital and spend an afternoon, morning or all day doing something for the veterans in the hospital or in the nursing home. We usually give out these little hearts in the morning and then we have a nice big lunch for them at lunch time. Then another one of the units or posts will come in and do a bingo, or something that goes all day. Also, you have received a copy of the deed transfer that someone had given to me from the Milford paper. Also, at the VA Hospital, they are going to have a "VETTES for Vets" show (corvette show) down at the River Front on October 3, 2004, from 11 to 4. I have some posters if anyone would like to have one for your unit. The proceeds for the registration of the corvettes will be given to the VA Medical Center to move the garden to a new location.

Newstadt (JWV) – Nothing of great significance relative to JWV, however, on a personal note, I was relatively active over the last 30 days getting around to the various organizations representing the Commission in an unofficial way, but briefing them on the Home. For example, I attended an MOAA luncheon on September 9, 2004. Also in attendance was Senator Dori Connor and she gave a great speech. At a JWV executive meeting on September 14, 2004, the executive committee pledged that they would in fact have an ongoing effort to support the Home and we are looking forward to the wish list that we will eventually come up with for the quality of life items and so forth. Also on a personal note, for those who are 141 types, Vietnam veterans, and anyone else who has been involved in the military since the 1960s, I attended the retirement ceremony at McGuire AFB for the C-141. On September 24, 2004, the first C-17 from McGuire AFB came in and the ceremony there was short and sweet.

Thompson – Senator Dori Connor is a good backer for us veterans.

Kitson (VFW) – At the fundraiser that was held by the VFW and WDEL 1150 on September 11, 2004; almost \$17,000 was raised between actual in-hand donations and pledges, so that all goes to Operation Up-Link and gives us a good start at beating the \$36,000 we raised last year.

Newstadt – I got around and very few people knew of that thing at the Elsmere Fire Company, so hopefully there will be better PR next time.

Kitson – It was basically a spur of the moment thing. I think we did really good for only having started two weeks before. It was Rich Johnson's idea and we did raise nearly \$17,000. I am still getting in pledges from the website.

Hastings (MOWW) – We had a MOWW meeting last week, and nothing of great significance, other than a lot of conversation about the draft, it is an issue that brings a lot of concern in the public mind. Something better than 40% of the troops in Iraq now are from the reserve components, the largest mobilization of reserve components since WWII. There have been about 110 National Guard killed in Iraq so far and 60 from the Army Reserve.

Thompson (MCL) – We had a person going around selling these little plastic ribbons that say I support the troops and shaped like a bow. He bought them himself and sold them and made \$1,200 profit. He brought the whole amount down to the Marine Corps League and he wants us to buy things to send out (\$400 each) to the four services over there. We have already done a Marine unit and need help finding the other services. I was going to talk to Hastings about getting a National Guard unit that is in country; we want a unit that will be there for a while because we have \$400 worth of stuff to send them.

Lardizzone (DAV) – National appointed me the new aide to the new National Commander and I am also the alternate NEC for District IV for Delaware, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Morris (American Legion) – The American Legion is continuing this year with the buck-a-minute, working with the State Guard. Also, the American Legion decided at its executive board meeting last week, that they are going to try to get together two tractor-trailer loads of relief supplies to specifically support legionnaires in the Florida area that need assistance. One of the things that was brought up by the Commander is that in this war on terrorism, we have people who

are POWs for less than the 30-day required to receive POW benefits from the federal government. The case in fact is the young lady who was rescued by a unit and brought back. She can apply, but she can not get benefits, because she was less than 30 days as a POW. The American Legion is probably going to follow-up on that concern through the national organization and see if it can be addressed, which will probably take awhile, but it is being looked at.

Baker -Just a point of information about the American Legion; I am a member of the American Legion also. Post 30 up in New Castle purchased a portable respirator for the VA Hospital earlier in the month of September.

Carroll (MOPH) – We will have a Region I meeting October 9, 2004, in Philadelphia. We have the National Commander coming in to meet with the various members of the State organizations throughout this region. I was able to attend our unit's reunion; we met down in Manassas and went to the Holocaust museum and also the WWII memorial. The second day we went to the Aerospace museum, and it was very well done. There is no fee to get in, but there is a \$12 fee to park.

Magner (AMVETS) – AMVETS Post 2 is hosting a District II National meeting on October 23 & 24, 2004, which is at Post 2 in Millsboro. All the department and post elected officers are asked to be in attendance and I plan to be there. Tomorrow, September 29, 2004, the VA is hosting the congressional review in the auditorium at 11:00 AM and all the organizations are usually in attendance there and a lot of the service officers will be there. Elected officials: Carper, Bidden and Castle are usually there in attendance to answer questions pertaining to veterans' benefits and what is coming off the Hill and what is going on there locally at the Hospital. On another side, last Friday, I had the opportunity to visit the moving Wall down in Seaford and I took some pictures for our VVA website and they are now on the website. Also, I took it upon myself to research the clock that Terry Spence had given all of us, in reference to the Purple Heart. I have quite a few of those clocks coming with the Purple Heart logo and I am going to use that for a fundraiser. Hopefully, the money we raise will be used for veterans' activities at the VA Hospital and around the State. Also, another organization I belong to, which is the Accent Order of the Hibernian, we named our division after Bernard McCarren, who was a Congressional Medal of Honor recipient at Gettysburg. Newark is having what they call a Turkey Trot (a 5K run) and they asked our organization to participate in some way, and in conjunction with our organization, they are having what they call a Hibernian coat project. We will be collecting coats, any type of coats that people want to dispose of and we will be glad to take those and we will have a truck on site to collect those. We will also be collecting money for our Delaware National Guard people that are being deployed; some way to help the families with the family assistance program.

Barr – Does this conventional get-together at the auditorium, is it a substitute or in lieu of the old VA Homecoming?

Carroll – No, this is something that is periodically done, either quarterly or semiannually, during the year and it is open to all veterans who have concerns about the VA Hospital and also what is coming from the capital, as far as veterans' benefits.

OLD BUSINESS

Thompson – Tony Davila has turned in our first response for the Sunset Committee. I am not going to read this to you, but I will have it sitting right here if anyone wants to go over it and see how we stand.

Carroll – How did things turn out? Are we pretty much in compliance with everything? I felt that we were, but there isn't anything hidden in the closet we need to worry about is there?

Davila – There were seven questions to be answered. The next response is December 17, 2004. If they do not like our responses, they will inform us.

NEW BUSINESS

Thompson - Commemorative Affairs for Veterans Day is going to change. Tony Davila, would you mention the new program?

Davila – Basically we are working with a choral group for Veterans Day, instead of having a guest speaker.

Thompson – Memorial Day is for those who have passed on and Veterans Day is for those of us who are still living, so why not have a little something different; some patriotic songs. Whoever suggested that, I think it is a good idea. Next on the agenda is elections, the ruling is all 14 members are eligible to run. If we have two people for the same thing, Tony Davila would you take a piece of paper and the two of us can leave.

Davila – However you would like to do it.

Thompson – For chairman, may I have nominations please?

Mr. Thompson nominated for chairman by Newstadt.

Mr. Hastings nominated for chairman by Harden.

Mr. Webb nominated for chairman by Kitson.

Webb declines nomination.

Ms. Harden nominated for chairman by Webb.

Harden declines nomination.

Thompson – Nominations are now closed, would you please write the name of the person you vote for and Tony Davila will take them.

Thompson - George Hastings wins the vote and will take over at the next meeting. Nominations for vice-chairman.

Mr. Thompson nominated for vice-chairman by Newstadt.

Mr. Kitson nominated for vice-chairman by Webb.

Thompson – Write your name down and give it to Tony Davila.

Thompson – Effective October 26: George Hasting is the Chairman and Jim Thompson is the Vice-Chairman for this year.

Newstadt – I would like to address the letter from the VVA. I certainly don't question the VVA for asking questions relative to the Home and so forth, however it is my feeling that some of these questions are inappropriate. Given the distribution of this letter, it almost appears as though they are looking for an adversary relationship between themselves and the Commission. Let me be specific, I do not think it is within the purview of this Commission to determine whether there is Minner property adjacent to the selected Home site. It is not up to us to answer for the Governor. Question 6 is a loaded question and I feel it is inappropriate and I think it speaks for itself. I would hope this letter is not the beginning of an adversary relationship between the VVA and the Commission.

Thompson – We can respond to the letter, but it will not be what you want, we cannot answer some of the questions.

Corsa – We are not looking to be anyone's adversary, what we are looking for is concerns about this Veterans Home. There are issues such as July 1 & 2nd. Is this the best site? In our opinion, and when I say our, I am talking about VVA, I do not think so. We were involved in meeting in all three counties and we do not think this is the best site.

Thompson – That July dead line was set up by Department of Administrative Services, who put out a timeframe and the Bond Bill Committee does not work for them or anyone else, they work for the Legislative Branch. They decided the day that they were going to hold it. I had exactly ½ hour notice to get down there. I had no authority to be there and they finally agreed to let me come in.

Corsa – When it pertains to veterans, we are not here as adversaries, we are here as advocates of veterans and the Veterans Home. If there was a deal made, then there was a deal made. Our opinion is that this is not the best location throughout the State for the Veterans Home. We see three different locations here, we are talking about wetland property, and we are talking about some type of historical property. I am sure this was known well ahead of the donation of this property. We expect answers from you, as Commissioners representing veterans, although we are questioning now whether you represent the veterans or you represent the State, and I don't say that to be an adversary, I just want to know. There was a time I came before this meeting and I said what is it you guys do and I am slowly, but surely, finding out. You kind of work for the State and if you work for the State, then that is who you work for, you are not representing me. You are advising possibly on how we feel, but I really am very confused about this.

Thompson – Just remember there are three different branches of the government and we are none of them, we are a Commission.

Corsa – Well sir, I am going to tell you this, I do not work for any State government, I did that already, but the bottom line is I am a citizen of Delaware and I am asking questions. Now, if you do not want me to ask this Commission, then I will go ask the legislators; of course I don't work for them either.

Thompson – I suggested, if you remember earlier today, that you address the people who hold the meetings, not me. I was just fortunately able to get in there and able to block a few of the spots.

Corsa – Like I said earlier, we not here as an adversary, we are not looking for a fight. We are looking for some reasonable explanation of certain discrepancies.

Davila – Let me answer the question, the VVA came here and said, here is a list of concerns and please respond. I suggest the Commission respond, end of discussion and let's move forward.

Timberman (DE/MD PVA) – I have two concerns from our chapter that many, many cases have been going to Philadelphia and we would like to know if VA is attempting to close the regional office in Wilmington. We can't get a definite answer and we would like one. The other question concerns an e-mail that we received from Social Services at the Wilmington Hospital. They requested funds to supply pamphlets concerning the ICI, which we believe the VA should supply. Why would the VA be requesting funds?

Davila – I think they are very good questions for the Congressional staff meeting tomorrow. Let the Congressional staff get a response from the Hospital administration.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: OCTOBER 26, 2004 (11:00 AM)

**LOCATION: Robbins Bldg, 802 Silver Lake Blvd, Suite 100
Dover, DE**

ADJOURNED